

2022 Spring Questions

Specialization Area: Media Studies

1. We have just lived through an unusual several years in which people have been more dependent upon digital media than ever before. Choose one interactive digital media platform that has been of great importance during this period –e.g., Animal Crossing, Zoom, Twitter –and apply two (or more) critical frameworks (e.g., Remediation, Convergence Culture, Persuasive Games) to help us understand how our engagement with this platform is continuous with and different from pre-digital media practices.

2. Are theoretical or generic models of film useful in a critical analysis of how social media has contributed to new forms and new genres of the moving image, via Reels, TikTok, Instagram Stories—think of unboxing, haul, tutorial, let's play, TikTok dances, etc., or are new critical models required? Drawing on scholars such as Manovich, Jenkins, Bazin, Mulvey, and/or McLuhan, make a case for a critical approach to platform video.

3. In Higgins' work "Intermedia," he states that popular forms of media exist within multiple forms of media, for example, Happenings or Fluxus. How does this concept still apply to our present forms of media? Give two examples of a new form of media that exists within the realms of intermedia? Are these two examples popular today because of the beliefs of "intermedia"?

Specialization Area: Design Research

1. With a reliance on large data sets, machine learning is highly likely to integrate systemic issues such as racism and sexism into its models. Given these issues, what are the problematics of 'technology as a putative social good' and how do they affect the design process? How might designers approach their design of applications/tools that rely on ML such that they counteract these issues? Use at least 3 of the readings to support your arguments.

2. When designing tangible computational interactions, there is often a tension between the physical and digital affordances and limitations. When considering critical design and making, what are some of these tensions, and how might these tensions be navigated as a designer? Use at least three of your readings to support your arguments.

3. Using Friedman's *Design into, by and for Design* (2008), Frayling's *Research in Art and Design* (2008), or similar reading as a starting point, describe the main ways that we can think about design research. Choose two of these possibilities and describe how they might be used in your specific area of research.

Specialization Area: STS

1. Given the overwhelming availability of information in our current society, issues around misinformation and disinformation between and amongst White people have become more

visible in the past few years—juxtaposed against the West’s long-standing and historical use of misinformation to control non-White cultures. Choose one example of misinformation or disinformation use that resonates with you and a) describe what the issue is, b) how it came about, and c) what might be done to alleviate this issue using readings to support your arguments throughout.

2. Using Arnold Pacey’s tripartite concept of technology, please describe the influence of culture on the development of a computational artifact or protocol (e.g. TCP/IP, HTML, email) of choice.

3. What are three of the hallmarks of feminist STS and how does it/could it potentially re-orient your specific area of research?

Specialization Area: HCI

1. Using Boden’s different kinds of creativity, consider ELIZA as a computational artifact. What kind of creativity does ELIZA engage in when interacting with a human (e.g., combinational? transformational?)? What about the artifact (product) itself? What kind of creativity (according to Boden) was involved in the creation of ELIZA?

2. How has the field of HCI turned towards (or away) from particular social justice issues in recent years? Choose one or more social justice issues that matter to you. Tell us why they matter to you, and how their treatment within HCI-related publications has either inspired or frustrated you. Reference at least three specific texts related to each. Finally, tell us what important work remains to be done in these areas. Are there unanswered questions that really resonate with you?

3. Draw a sketch (using Figma, Miro, etc. or doing it by hand) of a screenshot or set of interactions for a digital media project you might create as part of your dissertation. For a write-up, share your sketch, provide a list of all assumptions you are making about your target interactor, and describe how and why someone would interact with the screen/artifact (i.e., which parts are interactive? Why would someone be using this application?). Then using your readings, write a short justification for your decisions regarding: the layout of the screen (what information is shown where), types of interactions (why buttons vs input text vs dropdowns, etc.), and which choices are presented to the interactor (why these choices on these screens).

2021 Spring Questions

Specialization Area: Design Research

1. How have design studies become important digital media theory and practice in the past two decades? Discuss some of the principal designer-theorists whose work has become important for digital media.

2. How can critical design help us reinterpret Don Norman's notions of affordances? In other words, what is lacking from the definition of affordances in regards to critically thinking about objects? Draw from one or more texts on critical design in the reading list for your answer.

3. What is speculative design? In what ways does it constitute a radical break from the practices and assumptions of the traditions of design throughout the twentieth century? In what ways does it constitute a continuity with those traditions? Discuss with reference to authors who discuss and promote speculative design as well as specific examples of such design.

Specialization Area: Media Studies

1. In "The Myth of Total Cinema," André Bazin states that film's ontology as an idea and a technology directs its development toward "a total and complete representation of reality." Many scholars have noted the relationship here between cinema and virtual reality. Are cinema and virtual reality fundamentally intertwined, or distinct? How can VR/AR/XR be theorized in relation to previous media forms?

2. Theorists of play from Huizinga to Callois to Sutton-Smith have offered multiple taxonomies for thinking about this vital form of human culture. For one or more of these theorists, consider how well their framework of interpretation helps us to identify the ways in which specific digital artifacts foster distinct forms of playful engagement. Feel free to choose examples of artifacts from across decades and genres – such as drawing programs, spatialized virtual environments, social media platforms, performance sharing platforms etc.

3. Is the computer a new medium? Does it possess special qualities or characteristics that distinguish it from earlier media? Discuss with reference to theorists such as Murray and Manovich. You might want to choose one or two digital artifacts and apply your analysis. That is, if you argue that there are a number of media-specific digital qualities, then show how these qualities emerge in the artifacts. If you argue against the notion of fixed qualities, then show how these artifacts liberate themselves from medium specificity.

Specialization Area: STS

1. We learn from Haraway that our biological bodies are merely contingent and loaded with oppressive cultural baggage, and that we can construct new social realities by embracing the open possibilities of artificial "cyborg" embodiment. Does the realm of digital design inevitably reinscribe biological and social constructs or can it lead beyond them? Are there dangers in embracing the cyborg as the emblem of our digital future? Argue your position by citing relevant theorists and artifacts, including, if you wish,

speculative artifacts.

2. In the Information Age, those who control the curation of information hold great power in shaping our everyday lives as well as societal “norms”. With the growing reliance on AI and algorithm-based approaches to curation, the power now often exists without the important social and human context around the decision making, which affects already marginalized groups disproportionately. How can we approach information curation in a way that minimizes/neutralizes this effect? Cite relevant theorists and artifacts to support your argument.

3. A recurring theme in the STS texts on your reading list is that knowledge and its technological fruits is situational, hybrid, networked, and always rooted in a standpoint. At the same time, as Latour argues in *We Have Never Been Modern*, all these connections are ‘purified away’ in so-called modern society. The results are hybrid “monsters” of nature, culture, and discourse—monsters of our own creation that we struggle to comprehend. Discuss how the STS analysis of monsters can inform the design of digital artifacts in general, or of artifacts within a particular digital genre or format such as videogames or virtual reality.

Specialization Area: HCI

1. Since the 1980s, HCI has continued to evolve as a discipline, particularly by expanding the relevant disciplinary fields from which it draws. Identify one or two major trends in HCI during this period and discuss them with reference to major authors and texts that have defined these trends.

2. Bardzell outlines the attributes of a Feminist Agenda in HCI. Summarize those attributes and describe how a Feminist Agenda connects with two other methodological perspectives in HCI (e.g., action research, reflective design, or social-justice oriented design). Then, using an existing system or artifact of your choosing, how would it be different if it were approached through a feminist lens? And what social changes might occur if such a design imperative became ubiquitous?

3. The sociologist Erwin Goffman wrote *The Presentation of Self* in the 1950s, long before the mass participation in communication on the Internet. Yet his work continues to be cited in HCI research. Discuss how his work and related work by authors such as Turkle, Boyd, and others has contributed to our understand on the construction of self and identity from the 1990s to the present.

Bespoke Questions:

Many researchers and practitioners have claimed that VR offers a special opportunity to expand human understanding and sympathies in a way that will bring about social change. Many of these claims rest on the complex phenomenon of human empathy. Drawing on at least four

theorists and/or VR practitioners, describe the components of empathy, how we can measure it, and what affordances of Virtual Reality might support such claims.

What can cognitive science and psychology offer to help us understand how techniques of persuasion operate in digital media in general or in virtual reality or 360 video in particular? Are there general theories in these disciplines that seem especially applicable to these emerging media forms? Is there specific work on VR and persuasion that fits into the larger frameworks of cognitive science and psychology?

According to your definition, transgressive narratives may invite interactors to be active participants in the narrative, thereby giving them at least some power over it. This has the possibility of providing opportunities for interactors to introduce, and amplify, voices that may otherwise be unheard in traditional narratives. Table-top role-playing games provide different types of frameworks for active participation in narrative building, and some are more successful at affording opportunities to amplify currently concealed voices. Choose three table-top role-playing systems and discuss in what ways their frameworks support and/or undermine underrepresented voices and narratives. Back up your argument with theorists from your reading list.

Apply Suvin's concept of the novum to Lovecraft and explain how Lovecraftian novums can further the intervention of "games for change." How do you use Lovecraft's weird and eerie speculative elements without also reproducing his notorious racism? Working with relevant "beauties" as discussed by Csiscery-Ronay, Jr., and with any other relevant concepts from science fiction studies, closely analyze the elements of Lovecraft's novums to make a case for their inclusion transgressive digital artifacts.

Game controllers have changed over time and over videogame development cycles. Leaning on frameworks drawn from tangible computing and HCI, outline key challenges or opportunities we face today. Do not try to resolve these open questions but situate them in relation to existing work in interaction design and draw parallels between the evolution of HCI as a field and game controllers as a part of Game Studies.

Designing alternative controllers requires not only thinking about the controller but the interactive experience and interaction as well. Several readings on your list consider designing for collaborative play experiences and provide evaluations of existing systems and recommendations for future design for collaborative play. How do these design recommendations relate to and affect tangible controller design? What synergies and tensions are created when pairing alternative controllers with collaborative play design ideals? Cite relevant theorists and artifacts to support your argument.